

Inscribed ping pong paddle

Gift to Secretary of State Henry Kissinger from Zhuang Zedong, table tennis champion,
China, 2007

Before 1972, who would have thought that ping pong could change the world? Relations between the United States and China had remained frozen since the communist takeover of mainland China in 1949. Ping pong broke the ice between the two world powers.

Table tennis champion Zhuang Zedong presented this paddle to Secretary Kissinger in 2007. He was a ping pong master with a quirky style, famous throughout China. Zhuang made the gesture of friendship to the U.S. team leading to the Chinese invitation that made history.

In April 1972, after an official government invitation, nine U.S. players, four officials and two spouses entered China, a sports exchange that began the era of "Ping Pong Diplomacy." Five American journalists covered the team play. People in the U.S. eagerly followed the matches on television and in newspapers and magazines. Later, the Chinese team visited the United States.

As the relations between the U.S. and China thawed, Secretary Kissinger conducted important behind the scenes meetings leading to President Richard Nixon's breakthrough trip in 1972. Secretary Kissinger received this paddle 35 years after his 1972 visit.

The poem on the paddle reads:

*"On a foggy day in the orange glow [of sunset],
The spring waters cascade in a waterfall."*

Dr. Kissinger, I seek your counsel.

By Zhuang Zedong, Fall 2007, (Translation by FSO James Huskey)



Chinese table tennis champion Zhuang Zedong in 1961 at the 26th World Table Tennis Championships. He presented the ping pong paddle inscribed with his poem to Secretary Henry Kissinger in 2007.



Dr. Henry Kissinger, National Security Adviser, shakes hands with Chinese Premier Chou-En lai of the People's Republic of China at their meeting at the Government Guest House in Beijing, China, on July 9, 1971. (AP Photo)



Beijing, April 16, 1971, Chinese and U.S. ping pong delegations hold discussions during the U.S. team's visit to China. North and South Korea, India and Pakistan were among the 10 nations competing in this "Ping Pong Diplomacy." (AP Photo)